

**Mayor's Downtown Advisory Commission  
Minutes – February 1, 2011**

**Commission Members in Attendance:** Rod Austin (Downtown BID), Margaret Borg (Attorney), Barbara Berens (County Auditor), Brenda Desmond (District Court), Eran Fowler (Poverello Center – in Ellie Hill's absence), Ginny Merriam (City of Missoula), Susan Hay Patrick (United Way), Laurie Johnson (Downtown BID), Melinda Mason (WMMHC), Nick Roberts (Food Bank), Rob Scheben (Police Department), Leanne Vreeland (Ht. Patrick Hospital) Keenan Whitt (homeWORD), Jason Wiener (City Council), Keithi Worthington (City Attorney)

**Commission Members Absent:** Leslie Halligan (County Attorney), Ellie Hill (Poverello Center), Julie Hilley (Owner MKLaren), David Pierce (Salvation Army), Peggy Seel (OPG), Dave Strohmaier (City Council), Julie Weaver (Missoula Downtown Association),

**Others in Attendance:** Jean Curtiss (County Commissioner), Lori Davidson (Missoula Housing Authority), Melissa Gordon (OPG), Merry Hutton (St. Patrick Hospital), Michele Landquist (County Commissioner), Mike McGrath (Missoula Housing Authority), Adam Ragsdale (Missoula Housing Authority), Cindy Weese (YWCA)

**Conversation with Paul Carlson of HUD's Interagency Council on Homelessness**

We plan to discuss where Missoula is and where we should go next in developing a long-range plan to address homelessness and to hear from him about the elements of successful plans in other communities. In preparing for this visit, you'll find the ICH website helpful. Please visit <http://www.usich.gov/OpeningDoors.html>.

Mr. Carlson said it takes 30 years to get into homelessness. It is a long, complicated process to get out. The City of Missoula has the capability to help end homelessness. The general community will is here. There is a crisis in the downtown area with more than 100 people still sleeping on the streets at night. That creates energy in a program to help homelessness.

The assessment done by the City of Missoula shows people want help with housing. More data is needed such as what homelessness costs the hospital, jail, etc. Data collection is very important to helping find a solution to homelessness in housing. Merry Hutton from Saint Patrick Hospital had the data from 2009. There were 514 homeless individuals served. From those 514 individuals, there were 1,219 visits to the hospital for a total of \$3,028, 359.

He toured the Poverello Center and said it is in really bad shape. Something needs to be done sooner rather than later. They have been fixated on shelter, but a solution needs to be looked for. It cannot continue to function in the current building. The current building hinders success; there would be more ways to help support the homeless if they were in a new building. If there was a fire, it would be disastrous. Relocating the Poverello Center is not the answer. There needs to be more folks that can succeed using the shelter. It is not a one solution fix. Some of the services available are: full health care at PHC, shelter services, case management, HIV testing, counseling, three hot meals a day, food pantry, chiropractor, voluntary doctor, GED prep/resume services, clothing rooms, showers and more. Downtown business owners are not interested in

just moving the homeless along. They do not want to send them somewhere else as about 60 percent of them are Missoulians.

The Poverello Center has secured \$800,000 to relocate the housing. There would be more beds and meals. There are units on the ground, but the housing is not attainable by most of the Poverello occupants. There would be no wrap around services, but a lot of people can be serviced in an apartment complex.

The committee has been solely committed to those hardest to serve, writing the aggressive panhandling ordinance. It has only focused on the hard cases, which the City has done the poorest job of handling. This has been discussed with downtown business owners and their concern about panhandling. By the committee focusing on the population that brought them together originally, it will help the rest of the population also.

There is a growing number of families and singles that are becoming homeless. Children being homeless is a serious issue. There are more homeless families now and it is becoming a much broader problem. The committee needs to discuss how to help prevent these growing areas and look at different solutions for the different needs. There are a lot of people not at the table to discuss this problem such as teen mothers and Native Americans. The ten-year plan will help work on this issue as it is an all encompassing plan. The plan does not exclude any group and helps all homeless people succeed.

One challenge is housing and mental health professionals working together. There needs to be a centralized process. A centralized system could be designed around the system already in place. It is not well coordinated now, but that could be worked out. The money that could be obtained will come with regulations, and a centralized process will be needed. There could be strong federal backing for a point of entry. Having a centralized intake point of entry will be very important, and better information sharing will be necessary. A triage center makes sense, but everyone has confidential information. How would that information sharing work with confidential information? Mr. Carlson said that is a critical piece and HUD is working on that. Billings uses a model that fulfills HIPPA requirements. It is fairly inexpensive. A referral is made and tracked from the centralized intake. Merry offered to bring the person from Billings to discuss this if the commission wanted. A dual intake center might be necessary; one for families and one for those harder to work with. Funding could depend on having two intakes and parents might feel safer with their children in a separate area. Mr. Carlson said two intake centers does make sense. It would be a local strategic plan.

How to coordinate as a group working on the Poverello Center or the ten-year plan was asked. Mr. Carlson said the first thing is to build a centralized system. To work, there has to be agencies that are willing to work together and be flexible. The difficulty for some agencies is giving up some of the control each agency has. All agencies need to be involved such as the Salvation Army and Human Resource Council. There needs to be an operational leader and it has to be backed by the Mayor and elected officials. The beginning steps will be critical.

One of the first priorities of a ten-year plan would be to have a new location for the Poverello Center. The Downtown Master Plan emphasizes that the service of the Poverello Center must

exist. The space is prohibiting now. The community will be behind the plan as it will help attract downtown businesses and support the services of the Poverello Center. There are many organizations needed on the committee for the ten-year plan and educating the general public is going to be very important.

Billings has been through a ten-year program and their numbers have decreased. They are willing to share their information. There is no point of entry; the agencies have an agreement with each other. How long will it take to write a ten-year plan was asked. Mr. Carlson said there are a lot of pieces already in place. The hard part is getting the local agencies to back the plan and getting started. It was suggested the committee look at the following cities that have done a ten-year plan: Tri-Cities (family), Boise, Portland, Fort Collins, Bellingham, Tacoma and Billings.

Most of the PATH funding goes to Billings because they have an established PATH program that has been tested and is trusted. They have a street outreach, which is very important to have a team approach.

Missoula and Billings vary in the funding they receive. Billings receives a majority of the PATH funding, but Missoula receives 66 percent of the funding for housing. Some agencies say the Billings numbers for the PATH program are inflated. Mr. Carlson said to let HUD challenge their numbers. They also vary in the services offered. The crisis center in Billings is a 23 hour site; Missoula has no limit. Billings does not have a walk-in day center. Their crisis center is a room with cots in it. People wait up to one year to see a mental professional in Billings. Missoula's treatment for the mentally ill is much better, which helps the individuals become stable.

There is no detox facility in Missoula. One question is how to address substance abuse. Mr. Carlson said to focus on housing as it is more effective. Detox is very expensive and less people drink if they have housing.

Ms. Landquist said the County has a poor fund that has not been used in the best way. They are looking at distributing the money differently. Possibly that will be incentive for agencies to pull together and work on a ten-year plan.

The community needs to think differently than just letting the government solve the problem. The tax payers need to help with the solution of how to address the visible hardcore homeless problems. It is important to solve the issue for those folks, as well as the agencies that serve them.

Respectfully submitted,

*Melani Coyle*

Melani Coyle  
Administrative Support